

Guidelines for the Institutionalization of service-learning in European higher education

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December 2021



Foreword

The institutionalization of service-learning in Higher Education is fundamental to the development of its third mission, thus fostering social engagement and enabling students an experiential exchange with community partners which enriches all, bringing greater understanding, meaning and relevance to the other missions of Higher Education, teaching and research. This document derives from a study aimed to capture the multiplicity of views on the institutionalization of service-learning that may be arising within different European higher education institutions. This was an exploratory hypothetical-inductive research, looking to understand the singularities and peculiarities that may be characterising institutional involvement, funds allocation and financial strategies, coordinating unit/support infrastructure, rewards and recognition of students and teachers, and teaching principles.

For a sustained institutionalization of service-learning, institutions must be supported in developing ongoing and systematic evaluation processes, and focussing not only on the development of specific competences of the degrees, but also on transversal competencies. To achieve this, universities need to foster the planification of service-learning, so it is increasingly embedded across all institutional, faculty and degree levels. Therefore, these guidelines should be considered as the result of the transfer of research towards an educational practice committed to a fairer and more sustainable society, and to the organization of higher education and the policies that guide both processes.

However, this is not a finished process. Once this point is reached, it is necessary to continue evaluating its sensitivity to different contexts, as well as collecting recommendations for its improvement in the near future.

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The survey on service-learning institutionalisation processes in European higher education is permanently open. You can answer it at the following link: [EOSLHE Survey on SL Institutionalisation](#)



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How to cite this Guidelines:

Ribeiro, Álvaro, Aramburuzabala, Pilar and Paz-Lourido, Berta (2021). *Guidelines for the Institutionalization of service-learning in European higher education*. European Association of Service-Learning in Higher Education. Madrid.

Available at [EOSLHE](#)

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Introduction

The task of setting guidelines for the institutionalization of service-learning in European higher education is particularly complex. That is because service-learning is an experiential didactic methodology that is highly sensitive to socio-cultural variations, which gives it a character of commitment to the historical, situational, and cultural contexts in which it takes place. For this reason, one should not expect to find in this document the ‘correct answer’ or ‘the one best way’ to institutionalize service-learning in European higher education institutions. On the contrary, one should take into account the fact that decision-making and the establishment of commitments inherent to the institutionalization of service-learning must be carried out with the understanding that other choices are possible, and that in different contexts, different choices may turn out to be necessary (Push & Merrill, 2008). These guidelines were built upon substantial evidence in different European higher education institutions gathered by the European Observatory of Service-Learning in Higher Education (EOSLHE). In terms of the European literature, the preparation of this document took into consideration different sources, particularly the works of Aramburuzabala, McIlrath and Opazo (2019) on embedding service-learning in European higher education, and also the Europe Engage Project outcomes. In terms of non-European literature, the contributions of Furco (2002) on Self-Assessment rubric for the institutionalization of service-learning in higher education, and Bringle and Hatcher (2000) on the institutionalization of service-learning in higher education were also considered. Still, questions were raised for future inquiry for the institutionalization of service-learning in Europe. These are questions that can be complemented by other inquiries made in the Research Report 2021 (Ribeiro, Aramburuzabala and Paz-Lourido, 2021). Functioning as general landmarks, this set of guidelines can be used to guide service-learning providers throughout the performance processes of institutionalizing service-learning in European higher education, but also may provide a general overview on how to proceed in situations where there are no specific policies that guide the steps to follow. It is important, in any case, to understand the flexibility inherent in these guidelines so that they can be adapted to particular contexts.

EASLHE institutionalisation concept



“Institutionalization of Service-Learning is a multifaceted process that integrates civic engagement values into higher education curriculum of an institution so that SL becomes part of the culture of the institution. It implies the inclusion of SL in the strategic plans of the institution, to provide resources needed to support the use of this methodology, including a SL office, staff, funding and space, training, faculty rewards, credit recognition for student participation, and a program evaluation.”

1. INSTITUTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

To foster service-learning institutionalization, European higher education institutions should:

1. **Write** institutional mission statements focused on citizenship and social responsibility.
2. **Define** clearly short and long-term service-learning institutionalization goals.
3. **Include** the pedagogical approach of service-learning in strategic documents at different levels of university organization.
4. **Ensure** that service-learning is embedded across departments and throughout different levels of an institution's pronouncements, policies, and practices.
5. **Facilitate** opportunities for the university community to self-organize, promote and develop service-learning in conditions of equity and participation
6. **Set** administrative policies to promote positive institutional side-effects at the university, the local community and society.

Supporting literature by European experts

In order to achieve the goal of institutionalisation of service-learning, institutional support should be provided in terms of the development of administrative processes and resources to hold civic engagement activities. More specifically, it can include articulation in institutional mission statements, development of service-learning units, programmes, funding, spaces, staff, training and recognition systems, without turning into a highly bureaucratized practice (Meijs, Maas & Aramburuzabala, 2019).



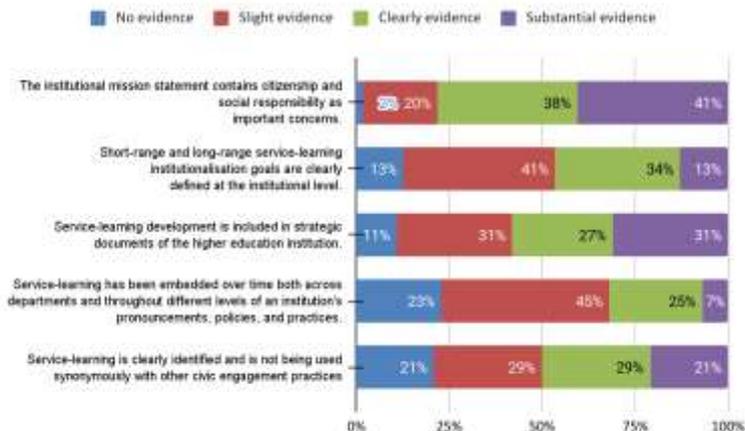
Supporting literature by experts from other regions:

“A primary component of service-learning institutionalization is the development of a campus-wide definition for service-learning that provides meaning, focus, and emphasis for the service-learning effort. How narrowly or broadly service-learning is defined on your campus will affect which campus constituents participate/do not participate, which campus units will provide financial resources and other support, and the degree to which service-learning will become part of the campus’ institutional fabric” (Furco, 2002:5; cf. Bringle & Hatcher, 2000).

Questions for reflection

- Does the institutional mission statement express its commitment to higher education’s civic responsibility of educating people for democracy and participation?
- Is leadership committed to a service-learning agenda of ongoing support?
- Are there sustained results or accomplishments? Are they reflected in institutional culture?

European data



2. FUNDS ALLOCATION & FINANCIAL STRATEGIES

To foster service-learning institutionalization, European higher education institutions should:

1. **Allocate** regular, primarily internal, financial strategies to design, implement, manage and evaluate service-learning programs, which could be supplemented and expanded by external funding if needed.
2. **Foster** equality by ensuring that low-income individual students can access service-learning projects.
3. **Adopt** administrative procedures to foster transparency and fairness in the management of the service-learning budget.
4. **Raise funds** from external organizations
5. **Consider** the costs of continuing training for all agents involved, the mapping of service-learning and dissemination processes through in-person and online strategies.
6. **Establish** a system for measuring the social return on investment.

Supporting literature by European experts:

Significant financial support creates a foundation for the strong institutionalisation of service-learning and tends to allow for the development of the experimental practice of service-learning on a large scale (Preradovic & Mažeikienė, 2019).

A deficit of funding and cuts in university funding is acknowledged as having a negative bearing on the adoption of service-learning as an approach and its institutionalization (Europe Engage, 2014).



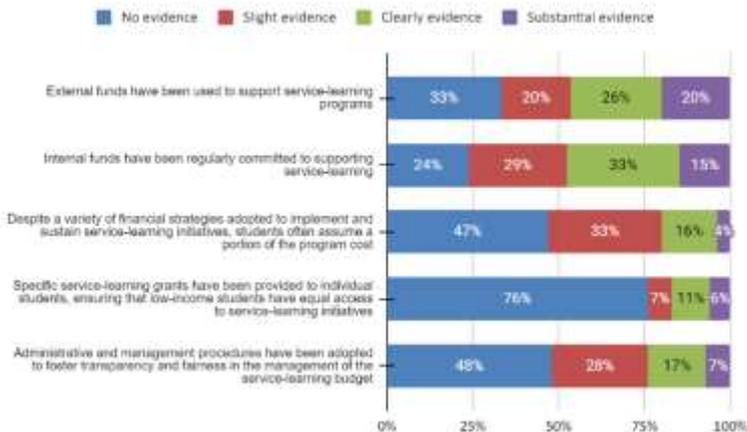
Supporting literature by experts from other regions:

Funding and financial strategies are important factors related to the use and the impact of service-learning in higher education, as it provides the necessary infrastructure for its success and sustainability (Bringle & Hatcher, 2000). "The campus' service-learning activities are supported primarily by hard funding from the campus" (Furco, 2002:14).

Questions for reflection

- Is there adequate funding available for enhancing service-learning work for faculty, students, and programs?
- Would it be appropriate for the students to pay for their participation in service-learning projects in order to distribute the financing of the activities?
- Is there a continuous effort to guarantee the transparency and fairness of the financing procedures?
- Is it ethical to accept the financial support of private companies?

European data



3. COORDINATION UNIT/SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

To foster service-learning institutionalization, European higher education institutions should:

1. **Establish** an office or a coordinating unit across the institution and within schools/faculties/academic centres, with specific staff responsible for service-learning affairs related to the students, teachers and community entities, and for other administrative issues.
2. **Set up** an advisory board of multiple stakeholders to ensure collaborative strategic planning, goal-setting and mutual benefit for all stakeholders.
3. **Incorporate** the voice of the students and external partners in the design of strategies related to service-learning at its different planning levels.
4. **Encourage** and **facilitate** the assessment and research of student learning outcomes, community partner's outcomes, and the self-assessment of teachers.
5. **Promote** and **support** training opportunities, pedagogical aids, resources and connections to the community, as well as access to other international entities related to service-learning.
6. **Recognize** the management and coordination actions of those involved in the different committees, commissions and processes.

Supporting literature by European experts:

The absence of a dedicated coordinating unit or team of people designated to the institutional development of service-learning is a major barrier to the institutionalisation of service-learning (Meijs, Maas & Aramburuzabala, 2019).



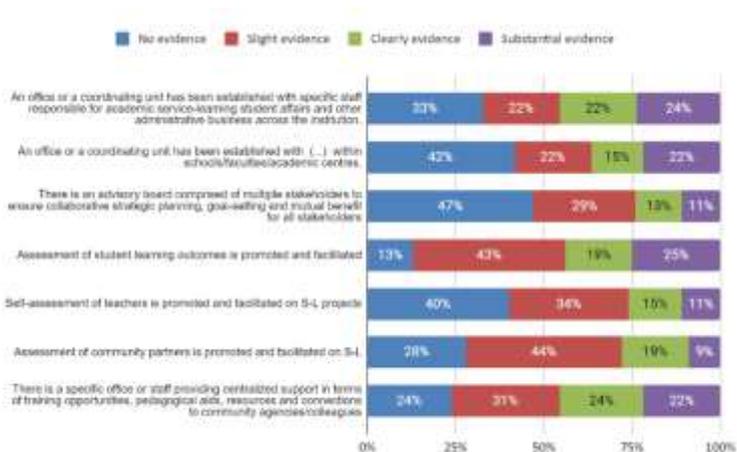
Supporting literature by experts from other regions:

A centralized office can support the professional development of faculty who teach service-learning classes, ensuring that it becomes an enduring aspect of campus culture (Złotkowski, 1996). A centralized office can provide technical assistance, logistical support, monetary incentives, recognition, and assistance in the recruitment process (Bringle & Hatcher, 2000). The identification of institutional responsibility with professional staff can help in the promotion of regular strategic planning, discussions, assisting faculty in documenting, regular recognition by faculty and administrators of the value of the work and outcomes, and scholarship (Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; cf. Furco, 2002).

Questions for reflection

- Are there easily accessible institutional structures that assist the university community with service-learning teaching and facilitate the relationships between community partners and various curricular and co-curricular activities in the institution?
- Is there a funded-based infrastructure to support partnerships and widespread faculty/student participation?
- Are students aware of opportunities and are they provided with ways to play a leadership role in the development of service-learning in their institutions?
- Is there a frequent assessment of both student learning outcomes, teachers' roles and the impact upon the community?

European data



4. REWARDS AND RECOGNITION OF STUDENTS & TEACHERS

To foster service-learning institutionalization, European higher education institutions should:

1. **Provide** faculty and students with different forms of incentives for participating in service-learning projects.
2. **Recognize** students' service-learning work with credits, and with a certificate or other form of recognition (besides credits).
3. **Incorporate** recognition into the faculty evaluation, tenure, and promotion processes.
4. **Facilitate** permanent training fostering faculty knowledge and confidence in service-learning activities.
5. **Increase** permanent faculty opportunities for joining national and international service-learning groups or outreach projects.
6. **Design** incentives for the different stakeholders to participate in service-learning projects.

Supporting literature by European experts:

Europe Engage project points out that a lack of internal and external rewards and recognition are significant barriers towards the embedding of service-learning within higher education institutions. Therefore, academic promotion mechanisms and internal and external accreditation systems as well as any academic rewards should acknowledge a civic and social commitment. (Meijs, Maas & Aramburuzabala, 2019).



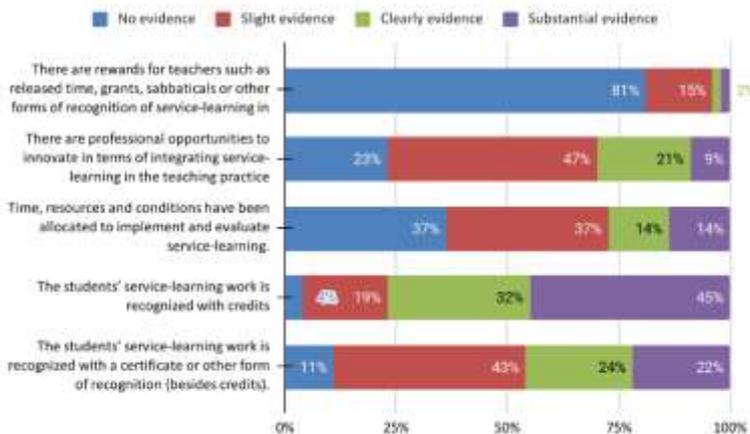
Supporting literature by experts from other regions:

“Faculty who are involved in service-learning receive recognition for it during the campus’ review, tenure, and promotion process; faculty are encouraged and are provided various incentives (mini grants, sabbaticals, funds for service-learning conferences, etc.) to pursue service-learning activities” (Furco, 2002:8). “The campus has one or more formal mechanisms in place (e.g., catalogued list of service-learning courses, service-learning notation on students’ transcripts, etc.) that encourage students to participate in service-learning and reward students for their participation in service-learning” (Furco, 2002:10).

Questions for reflection

- Do institutions properly balance external and internal rewards?
- Does the institution consolidate an academic climate that is supportive of service-learning?
- Does the institution inform the faculty about the indicators of high-quality service-learning?
- Does the institution provide opportunities for active engagement with service-learning?

European data



5. TEACHING PLANNING

To foster service-learning institutionalization, European higher education institutions should:

1. **Embed** service-learning over time as an experiential didactical methodology across all institutional and educational levels, and degree courses.
2. **Integrate** service-learning across disciplines, support interdisciplinary work.
3. **Encourage, support and facilitate** participation of students in conditions of equal opportunities to act as advocates and ambassadors for service-learning institutionalization, making them aware of opportunities and providing ways to play a leadership role.
4. **Promote** research on institutional local contexts and socio-cultural practices in order to promote reflection and critical analysis in accordance with real conditions
5. **Implement** social and situated learning, including external partners in the design and evaluation of the projects
6. **Promote** service-learning projects mediated by learning and communication technologies, including the particular design characteristics of e-SL

Supporting literature by European experts:

“The complexity of the social reality in which service-learning is framed, favours interdisciplinary design in the teaching and learning processes, which lead teachers to change their conception of the subject that is taught and their teaching responsibility, and to collaborate with colleagues of other subjects or disciplines involved in the service-learning project. The use of service-learning often promotes the development of teaching networks and research lines even for teachers from areas other than education and related fields” (Aramburuzabala *et al.*, 2019:236). (cf. Opazo & Aramburuzabala, 2019)



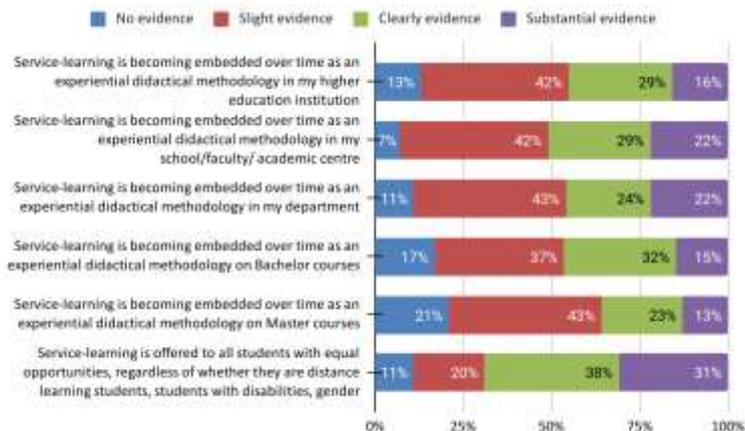
Supporting literature by experts from other regions:

Service-Learning is a teaching and learning method that can only be successful if all actors outside the direct teaching-learning situation are also fully considered (Chmelka et al., 2020). Service-learning is tied formally and purposefully to other important high-profile efforts on campus, e.g., teaching. (Furco, 2002).

Questions for reflection

- Are there service-learning courses with a community-based dimension that enhances the acquisition of (inter)disciplinary knowledge?
- Is building knowledge through experience institutionally accepted as an academically credible method of creating meanings and understandings?
- Is service-learning embedded in the arts and humanities, hard sciences, technical disciplines, professional studies, and interdisciplinary programs? Does service-learning exist only on the margins of the curriculum?

European data



6. TEACHING PRINCIPLES

To foster service-learning institutionalization, European higher education institutions should:

1. **Promote and facilitate** service-learning as a central teaching method.
2. **Enable** curricula to promote an active role for students in the identification of community needs for their service;
3. **Include** emotional and cognitive competencies, co-curricular learnings, and transversal competencies;
4. **Promote** interdisciplinary service-learning projects;
5. **Develop** online and international service-learning projects.
6. **Impregnate** service-learning with the ethical principles and values of social justice and education, including the gender perspective and social inclusion

Supporting literature by European experts:

“it could be fruitful to analyse service learning as a work-integrated learning method (Jackson, 2015), that can be adopted in higher education “to provide students with civic engagement competencies and work-life skills, along with an understanding of the overlap” (Nortomaa & Grönlund, 2019:85). “We clarified the meaning given to

service-learning within the international literature by referring to service-learning as a pedagogical method combining experiential learning within the curriculum and active engagement in the community (service) by students who were involved in activities organised in collaboration with practitioners from local organisations” (Zani & Guarino, 2019:171).



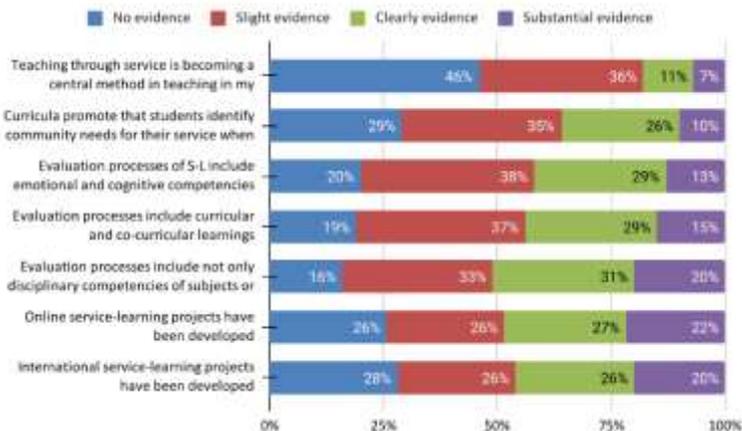
Supporting literature by experts from other regions:

Among other elements, for Bringle and Hatcher (2000) institutionalisation is achieved when service-learning is integrated into teaching guides and in the practice of teaching of higher education institutions. "Service-learning is such a delivery method, an approach to teaching and learning that promotes civic engagement through community service and meaningful reflection. With its commitment to social justice, service-learning seems a perfect fit for social work curricula and for a course on human diversity and oppression" (Maccio & Voorhies, 2012:51). "Faculty roles need to be redefined, as does the reward structure, to acknowledge, validate, and encourage a shift in teaching, scholarship, and service toward community engagement" (Heffernan, s/d:6).

Questions for reflection

- Are institutions facilitating opportunities for faculty to renovate their teaching methods? Are they employing a reflective teaching methodology that maximizes the value of integrating service-learning experiences with the curricular goals?
- Are there administrative mechanisms of support for faculty to redesign their curricula to incorporate national or international service-learning activities and reflect on those activities?
- Are there mechanisms of support for faculty to design interdisciplinary service-learning activities?

European data



7. SERVICE-LEARNING RESEARCH

To foster service-learning institutionalization, European higher education institutions should:

1. **Develop and conduct** a collaborative or participatory research agenda built on a partnership with the community which should stay focused on all stakeholders.
2. **Provide** training on service-learning research and making research resources accessible.
3. **Develop** mechanisms for promoting and rewarding engaged research.
4. **Disseminate** service-learning projects and research targeting groups of interest/stakeholders.

Supporting literature by European experts:

Although the Europe Engage survey results are enlightening and point to existing barriers for institutionalisation, further research is needed to unlock the full range of factors that might impede institutionalisation within higher education institutions in Europe - more research is also needed to examine how the influence of the different factors interact with each other (Meijs, Maas & Aramburuzabala, 2019).



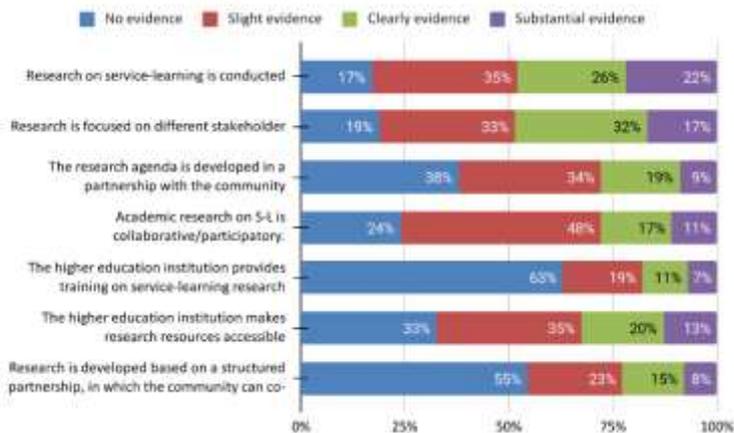
Supporting literature by experts from other regions:

“Where's the community in service-learning research?” This was one of the major questions discussed by leading service-learning researchers and practitioners at a 1997 meeting convened by Campus Compact in Denver” (Cruz & Giles, Jr., 2000:28).

Questions for reflection

- Is there scholarship oriented towards research that addresses issues defined by community participants and that includes students in the process of inquiry? Are service-learning research and teaching valid criteria for hiring and rewards?
- Are there community partners involved in defining, conducting and evaluating service-learning participatory research and teaching?
- Does the investigation seek to know the specifics and capture the singularities of the service-learning experiences?
- Is service-learning knowledge constructed by confronting researchers and the meanings of those involved in the activities?
- Does the research seek to describe the service-learning sociocultural and organizational contexts in light of the meanings of the social actors themselves?

European data



8. INSTITUTIONAL ADVERTISING AND SUPPORT

To foster service-learning institutionalization, European higher education institutions should:

1. **Manage** a service-learning web section and an online platform to facilitate the cooperative work between community needs and expertise from all stakeholders, as well as to enable the submission of candidatures/proposals of students and/or teachers.
2. **Create or develop** in conditions of continuous update a database or a catalogue with past/running/future projects or courses.
3. **Advertise** service-learning courses throughout the institution.
4. **Support** the visibility of students' participation in service-learning projects of all students regardless of their age, class, culture and race.
5. **Promote** the dissemination of Service-Learning throughout the university community, as well as to representative entities, policy makers and administration sectors in Higher education
6. **Promote** the participation of social partners, third sector entities and others, in public events related to service-learning

Supporting literature by European experts:

“University officers saw a clear link between service-learning and the improvement of teacher training programs, but this link needs to be developed in a structured way, and with explicit institutional support that better promotes how service-learning enhances the values of the teaching profession. Universities are ideal places for leading the methodological change in pedagogy. Articulating a comprehensive plan to implement service learning in higher education can gather momentum and resources for designing activities, documenting implementation, and evaluating results of the innovative pedagogy” (Opazo & Aramburuzabala, 2019:162). “The goal of institutionalisation is to provide institutional support for service-learning; that is to develop administrative processes and provide resources needed to support service-learning and civic engagement activities” (Meijs, Maas & Aramburuzabala, 2019:222).



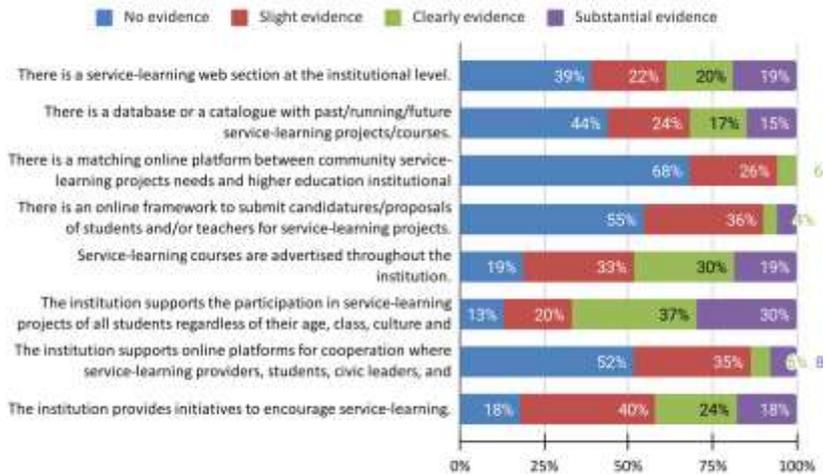
Supporting literature by experts from other regions:

“One of the essential factors for institutionalizing service-learning in higher education is the degree to which faculty members are involved in implementation and advancement of service-learning on a campus” (Bell et al., 2000).

Questions for reflection

- Do the faculty have sufficient training, or thorough understanding of service-learning pedagogy, or full institutional support, in order to make students experience the benefits of critical service-learning?

European data



9. STUDENT SOCIAL JUSTICE LEARNINGS

To foster service-learning institutionalization, European higher education institutions should:

1. **Promote** students' input in the design, implementation and/or evaluation of service-learning projects.
2. **Provide** students with practical social exercises of participating in policy making processes.
3. **Engage** students in activities involving taking responsibilities, community service, dialogue with peers and reflection.
4. **Connect** to movements in favour of social justice and democratic social change.
5. **Incorporate** consistent critical reflection sustaining longitudinal relationships and addressing structural inequalities.

Supporting literature by European experts:

“This innovative methodology is a space for the exchange of knowledge and experiences for future teachers while they are still students, for university professors who include the methodology in their teaching, and for communities who partner with universities towards social justice goals. Service-learning represents an opportunity for authentic integration of educational theory and community practice” (Opazo & Aramburuzabala, 2019:161).



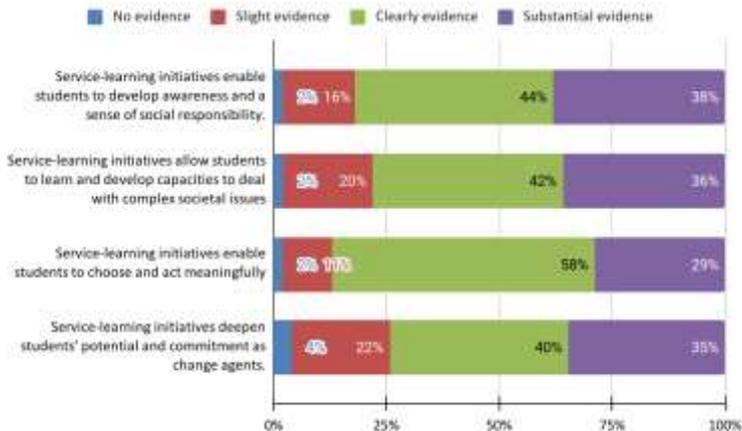
Supporting literature by experts from other regions:

Well-managed service-learning projects fit within the broader social justice paradigm by equipping the students with the knowledge and skills allowing them to move beyond acts of charity to address the roots of the causes of systemic social inequalities on their own (cf. Einfeld & Collins, 2008). “With its commitment to social justice, service-learning seems a perfect fit for social work curricula and for a course on human diversity and oppression” (Maccio & Voorhies, 2012:51).

Questions for reflection

- Are the teaching practices of service-learning emphasizing social justice values and contributing to learning within the social justice perspective? What are the different perspectives approaching social justice?
- How do different educators create classroom environments conducive to social justice learnings? Is service-learning increasing awareness regarding social justice in the local community and towards the common benefit?

European data



10. PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE COMMUNITY

To foster service-learning institutionalization, European higher education institutions should:

1. **Develop** sustainable and reciprocal partnerships between higher education institutions and civil society organisations through the implementation of service-learning programmes.
2. **Mobilize** appropriate community agency representatives serving as advocates and ambassadors for institutionalizing service-learning.
3. **Observe** the principles of coexistence and respect diversity in those involved in service-learning
4. **Work with the community** in the design, implementation and evaluation of service-learning projects
5. **Ensure** the inclusion of the diversity of perspectives.
6. **Establish** strategies for the celebration of the learning, the service and the partnership that make service-learning projects possible.
7. **Relate** service-learning projects with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Supporting literature by European experts:

“The rationale for these objectives is that if campus-community-partnerships and service-learning approaches are successful, then they most often will use experiential knowing, mindfulness and motivation” (Zani & Guarino, 2019:174). “The students cited that service-learning can also benefit higher education institutions in that it can broaden the scope for building sustainable partnerships with their surrounding communities” (Harte et al., 2019:201).



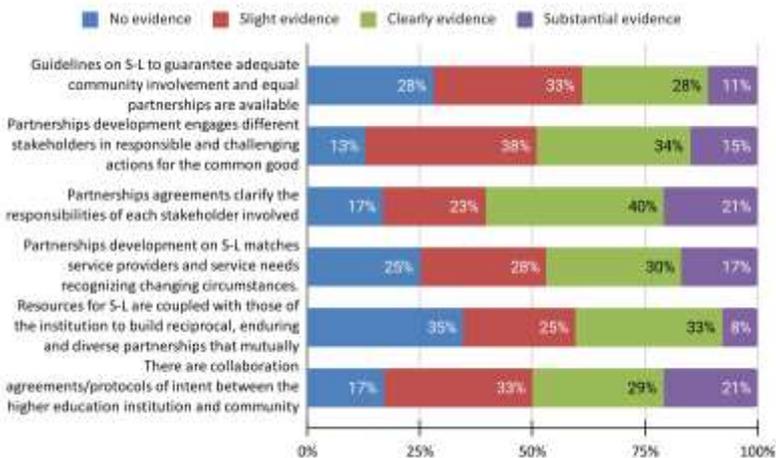
Supporting literature by experts from other regions:

“Well-executed service-learning represents a coordinated, symbiotic relationship between the campus and the community (...), with educational objectives deliberately integrated with community needs and goals (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999). Partnerships between universities and communities are reflective of a universal push by educators and scholars to halt rising notions of private materialism among young people and college students, a trend that has concomitantly reduced interest in public service and civic engagement (...)” (Bush et al., 2016:129).

Questions for reflection

- How deeply are all stakeholders involved in contributing to community-based education?
- To what degree can they shape institutional involvement to maximize its benefits to the community?
- Are the institutions providing substantial opportunities for advocates and ambassadors allowing them to express their particular agency needs? Are partnerships encouraging reciprocity?

European data



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